

FUJI FACTS

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The Atari Computer Enthusiasts of Columbus

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The Editor's Column

by Warren Lieuallen

As there were absolutely no submissions to Fuji Facts this month, I am featuring two main topics of my own choosing. The first is a very important editorial from the September, 1987 issue of *The SLCC Journal*. While I do not want to rehash the "XL vs. ST" issue any more (and I hope that this will be my last comment on the subject, as further discussion is non-productive), I was so delighted to find an article that says exactly what I've been thinking for so long, I just had to print it! Rather than bore you with my thoughts on this piece, I think I'll just let it speak for itself. Comments and "rebuttals" may be submitted as Letters to the Editor.

I'm also including a number of recent news articles that I've gathered from several different sources. Although you may have heard much of this before in the form of rumors, or parts of discussions after our meetings, I thought it would be worthwhile to get some of this current information in print, and bring us all up to date.

Next month's Fuji Facts will focus on Telecommunications. I have been asked by some of the SysOps to write a feature on CompuServe, and what it offers to the Atari computer user. I also plan on doing an introductory article on GENIE as well. Any other articles, related to Atari modeming or not, will be very welcome. If you'd like to help out with a review, just let me know!

You may not have noticed it, but the print quality of Fuji Facts has gone up again (I think so, anyway!). The reason for this is that, at this moment, I am sitting at a new IBM Model 80, typing this text with WordPerfect 4.2, and will be printing it using several proportionally spaced fonts on a Hewlett-Packard LaserJet series II laser printer! While I've always been proud of my "all-Atari" newsletter, I just couldn't resist this opportunity to "pull out all the stops" and play with my newest toy! I'd appreciate your feedback.

Atari Computer Enthusiasts of Columbus

This newsletter is written and published monthly by the Atari Computer Enthusiasts of Columbus (ACEC). ACEC is an independent, non-profit organization interested in exchanging information about any and all Atari Home Computer Systems.

Our main meetings are held on the second Monday of each month at 7:15 p.m., at DeSales High School (on Karl Road, just south of Morse Rd.), and are open to the public. Other Special Interest meetings are held as announced at the main meeting.

Dues are \$12.00 per year, and entitle members to all club benefits (Newsletter, Disk of the Month, Publications Library, SIG meetings, group discounts at selected area merchants, etc.).

Fuji Facts welcomes contributions of articles, reviews, editorials and any other material relating to the Atari computers, or compatible hardware devices and software packages.

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The masthead of this month's newsletter was printed with a Star SG-10 dot matrix printer, using TypeSetter 130. The newsletter itself was printed with a Hewlett Packard LaserJet series II laser printer in proportional pitch, using Word Perfect 4.2 on a 1 meg IBM Model 80 (sorry!).

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Guest Editorial

by Bob Woolley

We Loves Them, We Loves Them Not

One of the best things about being an editor for the SLCC Journal is that I get to read all the Exchange newsletters from around the country. Collectively, they contain everything you could every want to read about the world of Atari. No detail is left out. No stone is unturned. No roomer too uncertain. Sometimes, the stones are turned over many times -- 46 reports of the CES, 72 columns on the demise of Batteries Included, etc.

Which brings me to the subject of this article: the loss of support for the eight-bits; the death of the eight-bits; the lack of eight-bit software;

**... the ST and the Amiga
are not an advancement
in the field of personal
computers.**

I just read a piece in *The Pokey Press* that chronicled the author's transition from an 800 to an ST. Although the writer did not intend to completely retire the trusty old eight-bit, he was drawn to abandon his 800 by the sheer power and utility of the ST programs. He writes: "With a software line-up like I had available to me on the ST, what possible reason could I have to boot up my 800?" and "When it came to word processing, WordWriter ST, ...,

beat the stuffing out of anything available for the eight-bit..." with "... Flash was clearly superior to anything I'd used on the eight-bit (including my old family servant, Express!...)". Ken White, the author, continues his column with the observation that the door is slowly closing on the eight-bits as it has on the relics of the early years of computing: "Of course, the eight-bit Atari line will, one day, be a fond memory to everyone. Just like the Exidy Sorcerer and the Altos...." and "... a machine with 4K of memory and a tape drive was one day the 'cutting edge' of personal computing, that day was a lot of yesterdays ago".

That's funny. I have an old eight-bit and an ST set up side-by-side in my computer room. I also have Flash for my ST and Express! for my 800 XL. But, the ST is the one collecting dust in my house. When it comes to word processing, 80 columns or 800 columns (I only print 60 on an 8 1/2 inch piece of paper anyway), out comes the old AtariWriter cartridge. Flash is probably a great program, but the data still comes over the phone line at 1200 baud and I still only type with two fingers, so I use Express! on my "relic". Why? Am I just stubborn, or is there a valid reason why my eight-bit will always be the machine of choice, other than the cost of purchasing all new software and learning all new programs? Certainly, I use the ST, but only for things that can't be done will on the eight-bits, like Publishing Partner and Easy-Draw. Everything else seems to default to the XL.

The first indication of this trend was the response that I got when I inquired about a disk editor and useful utilities for my new ST. I am sure that they exist, probably in the Public Domain, but not commercially. The computer store where I bought my ST had a whole wall of ST software, but little of what I sought. Such a poor selection indicates very little user interest in buying software dedicated to these primary functions. Likewise, a memory map does not seem to be a favorite purchase for ST owners, either. In fact, the software offerings for the ST seem to target only the user or the advanced programmer. Little seems to interest those that would like to program their own systems. At this point, I would like to speculate about the flaw in Ken White's (and 800,000 others') reasoning -- the ST and the Amiga style machines are not an advancement in the field of personal computing. They are much too complex to be grasped by the casual user to be effective for the personal computer owner.

Computers came into existence about 40 years ago. Programmable calculators capable of logical comparisons, in themselves, could not accomplish as much as your average can opener without the stored program that someone had to create. Once the program is operation, then the system became a can opener, or whatever. This is where I would like to make the division between a computer and a Multi-Dimensional Electronic Device (an MDED). A computer can be programmed by the average user; an MDED cannot. A good example of an MDED is the 2600 game system. Pong was an electronic device -- fixed forever at the time of manufacture. The 2600 Atari was an MDED also, taking the configuration of whatever cartridge was inserted. This was a vast improvement over fixed program devices, but it was NOT a computer.

You had no way to do your own thing on it. A similar circumstance existed in the world of computers at that time. You could have your own terminal that hooked up to the mainframe and play Zork on your "computer", but unless you were a wizard, you had no chance to program the beast. Enter the personal computer (did you know that the Atari 800 was named the Atari 800 Personal Computer when it came out?). This development is a major branch in the general scheme of electronics. Now the user can actually program a calculation, decision making electronic device for the first time. I agree with Ken in that the early machines were destined to be replaced by equipment with more memory, disk drives and an improved operating system, graphics and user interface. All these features make programming your personal computer much easier and productive. My eight-bit is light-years ahead of an Exidy or IMSAI. But, is the ST?

If you follow the 2600/MDED branch of consumer products, you will find that this genre of products has been totally overlaid with personal computers of one sort or another. Dedicated word processors, graphics stations, music systems -- all sorts of MDED electronic products have been absorbed. But this is not personal computing. You are totally at the mercy of those who wrote the original program. No reasonable path exists for you to build on what they have done, or change the way they have done it. In fact, many of the higher powered MDED programs have been developed so that the user can configure it to his needs, and even arrange the order of execution of the modules! A programmable MDED! Funny how the market seems to prefer such products.

Now, granted, you could change the programming of a 2600 if you really wanted to. You could re-do the circuitry inside you Pong, too. But, they are not programmable. Is the ST programmable? For a professional programmer, the ST must be fantastic. One of the reasons that less eight-bit software is available is the fact that all the commercial programmers that would write for the XL/XE's ran out and got an ST. No question about the rationale behind that move. But, can we draw the conclusion that the eight-bit is dead? These guys are not writing software for their own use. Would they all run to buy an ST if all they wrote was PD stuff for their friends? The question is: does the ST improve your ability to control your personal computer or do your own thing? Even at less cost, it makes no sense to "move up" to a system with less utility. As an MDED, no question; if you have an application, use the ST MDED -- it is the best system available. It will be surpassed in the near future by even better products, but it is on top of the heap now. As for programming the thing, I seem to draw a joker.

Back to my use of AtariWriter. I find that I can work with the raw data from its files easily. The format is simple and well defined. The program itself has just about any feature that I am willing to use. As an example, I have the Thunder! spelling checker for my ST. I could use it while I type part of my text to check my spelling. I don't. It isn't worth my time to learn how to use the thing just to do proofreading. The word "roomer" in the first paragraph would probably go through without a hitch, since it's spelled correctly, which means I have to review the text myself anyway. When I bought my ST, I looked for personal computing stuff -- source code, disassemblers and like that. I

certainly had little interest in a copy of MoonMist. I can get that on my eight-bit (and if I can't, I can get something similar). I will certainly buy MDED products for my eight-bit, but I am not limited to them. Ace-Crack Pascal at \$150 is not my idea of a personal computer users' language. I want BASIC. So does almost everyone else that wants to use his computer for personal use. I also want to understand my hardware and how the operating system uses it. Like how to make the joystick inputs into outputs, and how to turn the screen upside down (that may seem silly, but if the hardware exists to execute such a routine, I would like the documentation to use it). The features in the eight-bits over the early personal computers made it much easier for the novice owner to use as a personal computer. The "advances" incorporated into the ST make it a better MDED, but not a better personal computer. If I want a simple program to change the CompuServe line feed-carriage return into a CHR\$(155) character, I can write it myself. I can access the data. I can also download a program that someone else wrote to do the same thing. Look at the Disk Library program that is floating all over the country. I'll bet hundreds of people have modified the original to suit their own purposes. Most of the modifications are also available for me to make use of.

Sure, the ST may be a better 2600, but I don't think it will replace my eight-bit. I doubt that the 32-bit systems will be any better in that respect, either. Look at it this way: most of us would trade their 1951 Ford for a 1987 model. How many of us would give up their car to buy an airplane?

Atari Corp. News

Reprinted from Z-Magazine via the ACEC BBS

Atari Corp. wants to buy the Federated Group Inc.'s 65-store retail electronics chain for \$67.3 million. By this Friday, it will tender an offer for the 10.7 million outstanding shares of Federated stock, seeking to gain control of stores in California, Arizona, Texas and Kansas.

According to The Associated Press, Federated's seven-member board unanimously approved the \$6.25 a share offer, noting the firm "has had trouble finding retailers for its products. Among other things, the merger hinges on the approval of Federated's lenders." Federated lost \$895,000 in the first quarter ended May 31, compared with a profit of \$662,000 for the same period last year, the wire service says. Sales rose 2 percent to \$91.1 million. Atari's own financial picture has improved lately. In the latest quarter, its profits were up 39.3 percent to \$13.54 million, while revenue rose 16.4 percent to \$70.69 million.

Atari Corp.'s move this week to acquire a retail electronics chain is not an isolated event. "If other transactions come along that fit into our business plans, we'll do additional acquisitions," says Atari treasurer Steve Kawalick. Atari Corp. wants to buy the Southern California-based Federated Group Inc.'s 67-store chain for \$67.3 million, a move that would give it control of stores in California, Arizona, Texas, Kansas and New Mexico. The Associated Press reports that the deal, which is subject to approval by a five-bank consortium that has extended Federated a \$48 million line of credit, was worked out with Federated founder/chief executive

Wilfred Schwartz, who will continue to run Atari's Federated subsidiary.

Schwartz told AP, "It's a marriage made in heaven. We felt we wanted to augment our resources with the human and financial resources available through a union with an extremely strong winner." The wire service notes, "Most of Federated's stores cover half an acre and boast a vast selection of electronic specialty merchandise, including Atari's bottom-line personal computers." Atari's Kawalick comments, "This particular acquisition gives us additional distribution channels in certain parts of the country."

Atari Corp. Chairman Jack Tramiel says his firm's acquisition of the 67-store Federated Group electronics store chain will be a mighty tool against Japanese competitors. Tramiel told The Associated Press, "Our Japanese counterparts all have their own stores in Japan. I like to copy success." He also said that there are "no consumer electronics companies today in the United States. We need to rebuild that and I think we can do it."

AP quotes Tramiel as saying that Federated was bought in order to reduce the time it takes for products to be accepted by dealers. And "the move will also spread research and development costs over a larger organization," the wire service said. Tramiel says it will start making a profit almost immediately "by slowing the recent expansion drive and gaining from more advertising and the addition of new Atari products."

Atari Hardware News

from the ACEC BBS Database

New Eight-Bit System:

The newest eight-bit system from ATARI is not really all that new. It is a game system based on the XE. The main unit consists of a 65XE minus the keyboard. It comes with two joysticks, and has the START, SELECT, OPTION and RESET keys on it. These keys are round, and nicely colored in pastels. The whole unit is a small square, but is diagonally oriented, to go with the XE styling. The XE game system also has a gun similar to the one implemented on the SEGA and NINTENDO systems. A keyboard is optional, but essential if the unit is to be used with a disk drive. The thing looks better than the NINTENDO and SEGA consoles, and instead of making a futile attempt to describe it, I'll direct you to ANALOG or ANTIC, one of which will probably feature a picture in their CES writeups.

This new system is compatible with all XE software and hardware, such as the new cassette drive and 3.5" microfloppy. The XE game console can also be plugged to the new SX212 modem, due out shortly. The SX212 works at 300/1200 baud, features a built-in speaker, XE, ST and RS232 ports. The SX212 follows the HAYES Smart commands, except for a few dealing with autodial directories. These directories are featured in most terminal programs anyway. The bad news about the SX212 modem, for XE users at least, is that you will still need an 850 or P:R interface if it is to work with existing software. A new handler will have to be devised if the SX is to work directly off the serial port.

What this boils down to is that if you don't have an interface, the SX works like a souped up 1030. This news is not entirely discouraging, since the handler will probably be compatible with the handler for the XM and 1030 modems. Look for this modem to sell for less than \$100 this spring.

There are a few other things which do not make too much sense about this system. For one thing, it looks like an XE, and works like one too. If that's the case, then why should anybody prefer the game over the computer? Also, by producing three game systems (the 2600, the 7800 and the "XE"), won't ATARI be sending mixed signals to the prospective video game buyer? And remember, like the XEP and 65XEM before it, the XE game system was only a prototype, and may or may not make it to market.

New Eight-Bit Accessories:

The XEP80 80-column adapter was another piece of new XE hardware. It will also be out soon, and should sell for around \$80. We did not see the XEP in operation, however. Instead we saw ICD's 80 column adapter, which is actually better than the ATARI product. Unfortunately, the ICD adapter only works with ICD's Multi I/O (MIO) expansion box, and the combination could cost upwards of \$300.

It was rumoured after last WCES when ATARI had two working prototypes of 320K XEs, that these machines would be produced. ATARI

did not show any new XE other than the game, so third party will be the only avenue for a super XE for a while.

Most of the 8-bit innovations were for the ATARI were presented by ICD, maker of the P:R: CONNECTION, MIO, RAMBO XL, and SpartaDos. ICD president Thomas Harker showed us the PRINTER CONNECTION, which looks like an ordinary ten foot cable, but is actually a printer interface. ICD also had a prototype cartridge of SpartaDOS X which supports not only UltraSpeed I/O with ICD's US Doubler for the 1050, but also the INDUS GT's Synchronesh. The 32K cartridge also contains 80 column support, a built-in database, and should work with the new 3.5" ATARI drive. The SpartaDOS X cartridge is not yet complete, but will retail for \$80 when it comes out.

New Atari PC Clone:

"Presently, the PC-compatible industry is moving in two directions. At the low end, a group of more or less anonymous clone makers are packaging "bare bones" systems for the mail-order market. Buyers of such machines often find that they must add several hundred dollars worth of extra hardware before their "bargain" systems can accomplish useful work. At the high end, clone makers such as Leading Edge and Compaq are providing more complete systems than IBM itself. At prices starting at around \$1200 and up, however, these machines can only be considered bargains in comparison with the even higher cost of going with Big Blue. In designing their PC, Atari management decided to run counter to both dominant trends. Instead, they reasoned that by applying new technology and old-fashioned manufacturing leverage, they could bring to market a fully-loaded, state-of-the-art system -- a "here's

everything you'll ever need" PC, at a price-point low enough to undercut even the "el cheapo" clone makers. They appear to have succeeded. The Atari PC, which will retail for "around \$500," is a compact and elegant system loaded with features not found on systems costing literally thousands of dollars more. Measuring about 14" square by only 2" high, the Atari PC system unit includes a built-in, half-height 5.25" diskette drive and integral power supply. An XT-style keyboard attaches to the unit via a coiled cable. A second 5.25" drive or ST-style 3.5" drive, capable of reading disks in either ST or IBM format, can be attached externally. But that's just the beginning. The Atari PC comes with 512K of RAM, expandable to 640K via sockets on the motherboard. Standard serial, parallel, and combination video ports, and an ST-style disk port, are all included. A mouse port, based on the Microsoft INPORT chip, is built in, and an ST-type mouse is included with the system. Thus, unlike competing PC-compatible systems, the Atari PC will be able to run PC GEM, Microsoft Windows, and mouse-based programs like Microsoft Word, right out of the box. The Atari PC employs an Intel 8088 microprocessor which can run at 4.77 Mhz and in an enhanced, 8 Mhz, "turbo mode." An 8087 math coprocessor, running at either speed, can be added via a socket on the motherboard. As one would expect, Atari has paid special attention to the Atari PC's graphics capabilities. Most low-cost PC compatibles support only the IBM Monochrome mode, and are thus text-only systems. A few of the more expensive clones include IBM Color Graphics Adapter (CGA) and/or Hercules monochrome graphics capabilities. IBM Enhanced Graphics Adapter (EGA) 640 x 350 x 16-color graphics capabilities have, in the past, only been accessible via expensive upgrades to a system's display

high-resolution monitors. Moreover, purchasers of the supposedly downward-compatible EGA enhancements have often been disappointed to discover that IBM-style EGA isn't as downward compatible as they hoped -- some CGA software won't run. Yet, Atari has managed to shoehorn IBM Monochrome, CGA, EGA, and Hercules graphics capabilities into the Atari PC. Besides the fact that the Atari PC is the only PC-compatible to include EGA graphics as a standard feature, Atari's Shiraz Shivji notes: "our EGA is completely downward-compatible with CGA. As a result, users will experience no compatibility problems when using the lower graphics modes." What's more, Atari has announced a \$200 monochrome greenscreen monitor for use with the Atari PC that can display all its graphics modes; including the

high resolution EGA color mode, using intensity gradients (gray scales) to represent colors. This is the first monitor that incorporates these capabilities. "The monitor is intelligent," says Shivji, "and recognizes the frequency of signals coming from the combination video port, adjusting itself appropriately to display whatever kind of text or graphics the machine produces." The Atari PC is virtually 100% compatible with software available for the IBM PC and XT. While its slimline housing provides no room for mounting internal circuit cards, it is doubtful that more than a handful of users will require more capabilities than the machine provides in its off-the-shelf configuration. For those who do, Atari intends to provide an external expansion box in the near future.

The New ACEC BBS

The ACEC Bulletin Board System is back, and better than ever! We are now running the Carina system (one of the most powerful and flexible available BBS programs for the eight-bit Ataris), and have added a 10 meg Corvus hard drive.

For your security, and to eliminate any inconvenient "validation" system, our BBS operates on a "call-back" system on your first call. This means that you must provide the BBS with the telephone number from which you are calling. After disconnecting, the BBS will then call you. Have your terminal program set to auto-answer, and you're on! After saving your password, you will not need to go through this call-back procedure again.

Our board operates at both 300 and 1200 baud, and is up 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. We offer several different message bases, including Frank Seipel's nationwide Network system, a number of interesting database sections (including one specifically devoted to information about ACEC and reprints from Fuji Facts), and literally thousands of downloads, with more coming every day!

Frank has done a really nice job of preparing a number of different help screens (just press "?") to make this new software easier on everyone. Give us a call at 471-8559. I think you'll like what you see.

Antic On-Line

by Nat Friedland, Antic Editor

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ATARI PRODUCT UPDATES

Just as this issue went to press, Antic was invited to visit Atari and preview the new SLM804 Laser Printer in action. The quality of the printing is truly as impressive as you've heard. While we were in the Atari Engineering Department observing their laser printer crank out ultra sharp pages, on a workbench behind us was a line-up of seven Atari PC clones. These IBM-compatible Ataris were running a wide range of MS-DOS software, from Lotus 1-2-3 to Flight Simulator II.

According to Atari Marketing Communications Director Neil Harris, those PCs were a pre-production test shipment. In a manufacturing start-up timetable, this would put the PCs about 30 to 45 days behind the 2-megabyte Mega 2 and 4Mb Mega 4 three-piece STs.

The first production run of Megs was shipped to software developers and is now going on sale in Germany and France. Harris said that a major "rollout" of the Megs and laser printer would take place in October, with a series of regional dealer meetings. At that time, final prices for these products were to be set.

Antic has just received a developer's 4-megabyte Mega 4 (with blitter chip), which will be covered in detail in coming issues of Antic and in the Spring 1988 issue of STart, The ST Quarterly.

We opened up our Mega's motherboard box and looked at the clean chip layout. Especially impressive was the wide-open Direct Memory Access which should make it easy to tap the power of the Mega for a variety of specialized hardware uses.

Of course, while at the Atari Corp. we also took advantage of the opportunity to check on the latest status of previously announced hardware for the 8-bit computers. According to Harris, the first cargo containers of the 80-column XEP-80 display box (Antic, July 1987) and SX212 1200-baud modems had just arrived in Atari U.S. warehouses. We also heard that the XE Game System computers and many new XL/XE-compatible game cartridges were due to start reaching the stores in October.

However, the double-sided, double-density XF551 Disk Drive shown at the June Consumer Electronics Show (Antic, September 1987) will not be scheduled for manufacture until programming of the new operating system is successfully completed by Bill Wilkinson and OSS, Inc.

ACEC Meeting Minutes

September 14, 1987

The September meeting of the Atari Computer Enthusiasts of Columbus began at 7:20. Our short business section featured a discussion of this BBS (mostly its return, and the new call-back feature). It was requested that users use their real names instead of resorting to handles on this system, and everyone was reminded that uploads are always welcome.

Another upgrade is available to those members who are using DBASIC on their ST's. The current revision is 4.0.

The September Disk of the Month featured several interesting programs. The most useful is the Daisy Dot Near Letter Quality emulation system which I reviewed in Fuji Facts two months ago. There is also a maze game, written by yours truly several years ago. Finally, the flip side is a childrens' story by Clint Parker (the author of Action!) featuring sound effects and animation.

Being September, nominations were then accepted for the elections next month. Here's a list of those nominated so far:

President: Charles Brown

Vice President: Dave Beck

Disk Librarian: Jim Murphy

Newsletter Editor: Warren Lieuallen

Treasurer: Dave Feeney

Publications: Mark Schmidbauer

Secretary: Don Bowlin and Dick Sampson

Membership: Paul Rogers and Charles Brown

Nominations will again be accepted next month, and we will then hold the elections.

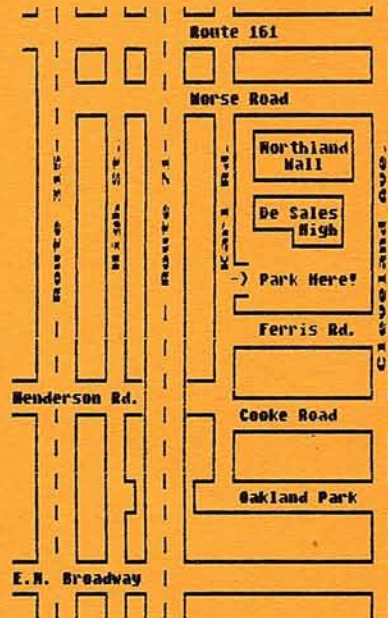
The main demos of our PD Night then began with Jim Murphy demonstrating the use of ST Writer on his ST, and me showing both SpeedScript and TextPro. A very brief showing of SpeedCalc and the Analog Database then followed, and the I then concluded with some entertainment software (music and games). Mike Koss finished out our demos with his own ComputerEyes digitized creations and slide show.

Our question and answer session followed, dealing with heat-transfer printer ribbons, the availability of the new Atari 1200 baud modems for \$80, and a new Atari-specific retailer here in town (Software Plus, 4541 E. Main St., 239-0336). This store is also sponsoring a BBS (239-0349).

The meeting then adjourned at 9:42 p.m. Next month's meeting will be October 12th.

Warren Lieuallen

(not to scale)



An official Users' Group, the Atari Computer Enthusiasts of Columbus meets on the SECOND MONDAY of each month. The meetings are held at 7:15 p.m., at De Sales High School on Karl Road. Meetings are open to the public, and consist of demonstrations and short tutorials of products for the Atari Home Computer Systems. Dues for ACEC are \$12.00 per year, and include a subscription to Fuji Facts, and more!

WGL '87

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